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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [IZ](#) [UK](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ MND-SE UPDATE: UK TO BE OUT OF BASRA PALACE
BY AUGUST; UN TO KUWAIT; LITHUANIANS, ROMANIANS TO STAY

Classified By: PolCouns Richard Mills for reasons 1.4 B, D

11. (C) SUMMARY: The entire UK presence at Basra Palace, both military and civilian, will be transferred to Basra Air Station by August, UK MOD officials told Embassy London March 11. HMG understands the USG has not yet reached a decision on its own presence at Basra Palace but asks that a decision on the ultimate disposition of the U.S. Regional Engagement Office (REO) be made as soon as possible, so that the UK can begin to coordinate a hand over of the Palace with the Iraqis. MOD officials also reported that the UN has decided to transfer its two employees from Basra Palace to Kuwait; the Romanians, whose current mission is to guard the UN employees, have indicated a desire to stay on in MND-SE in a different capacity. Meanwhile, the Lithuanians have agreed to stay in their current ground forces capacity, despite the change in the Danish mission. END SUMMARY.

FUTURE OF BASRA PALACE

12. (C) HMG has made its final decision to withdraw completely from Basra Palace, UK MOD officials told Embassy London in a FCO/MOD meeting March 1. The Consulate staff will complete its move to the Basra Air Station (BAS) by the second week in April; all other aspects of the UK presence, including military and support staff, will be repositioned to BAS by August, at which time the UK intends to hand the Palace over to the Iraqis. PGHQ LTC Ben Farrell said that the UK believes returning a totemic building like the Palace is entirely consistent with the overall policy of transition to Iraqi control as conditions warrant. He noted that the Basrawis have been delighted with the hand overs of Shaiba Air Base, the Old State Building, and the Shaat al-Arab Hotel. FCO Iraq Security Issues Deputy Head Giles Lever said the FCO is considering keeping an office in the Basra Palace after the UK Consulate moves to the BAS in April, but stressed this space would be closed in August.

13. (C) HMG does not plan to approach the Iraqis about the hand over of Basra Palace until it has sorted out arrangements with coalition partners, especially the U.S., Farrell and Lever said. They recognized that the USG has not yet formally decided how to proceed with its assets at Basra Palace, but asked for a plan on the future of the U.S. Regional Engagement Office (REO) as soon as possible. The UK is particularly concerned about security around the Basra Palace compound in the interim period between when their Consulate departs in April and the Iraqis take control in August, Farrell and Lever said. They suggested the U.S. consider moving into the UK Consulate accommodations once they are vacated, leaving the southern section of the compound vacant; this would open up more options for securing the southern section. Farrell said he will be part of a military delegation visiting Washington on March 22, and Lever said FCO Iraq Director Simon McDonald plans to travel to Washington March 26-27; both would raise this issue with their U.S. counterparts.

UN EMPLOYEES TO KUWAIT, ROMANIANS TO REMAIN

14. (C) The UN has decided to relocate its two employees currently in Basra Palace to Kuwait, thus effectively terminating its mission in Basra for the present, Farrell said. The UK has urged the UN to reconsider, pointing out that there is space for a UN presence at the BAS; the UN has said it will consider resettling at the BAS at some stage. The Romanians, whose current mission is to guard the two UN employees, are fed up with their 'non-job,' said Farrell, and have told the UK they would like to stay on in a different capacity. The UK is currently exploring whether the Romanians would continue to protect the southern section of the Basra Palace compound until August, and then switch to force protection at the BAS, although moving out from under a UN mandate could cause the Romanians difficulties, Farrell acknowledged.

LITHUANIANS TO STAY

15. (C) The Lithuanians have agreed to stay on in MND-SE in their current capacity, Farrell reported. The Lithuanian plan is to dis-embed from the Danish force when the Danes switch from ground to air support, continuing on as a ground presence. The Lithuanians would continue to receive support from the Danes, whose support systems will remain more or less the same. The UK has asked the Lithuanians to consider doubling their current presence to 100 soldiers, and the GOL is considering the offer, Farrell said.

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